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ABSTRACT

An action conference on issues related to community college student success was held in May 1986 to stimulate and share ideas related to access, assessment, and intervention that would better ensure student success. The reports and working notes of the small groups assigned to examine these topics were used to create this summary document. Following introductory information on the conference, the issue of access is discussed in terms of four "action areas" (i.e., providing information about procedures and standards to high school and other potential students, as well as to current ones; providing services at the "front-end" which are designed to ease enrollment of any student at the time and place of first inquiry and of subsequent enrollments; providing the instructional support to students that enables academic success within the open doors of the community college; and providing services and instruction addressing the broadest possible range of student needs). Next, a discussion on assessment stresses the importance of active board support, personal interaction with students, and sensitivity to student anxieties in the assessment process. This section then considers issues related to when to assess, what to assess, and mandatory assessment. The discussion on intervention addresses the important components of coordinated college-wide commitment, orientation processes, and a system for monitoring academic progress, as well as optional intervention strategies. (EJV)

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Connie Green, conference chair, Marcia Peglow-Hoch, Jim Roberts, and Gretchen Schuette comprised the Student Success Strategies planning committee. The small-group facilitators, coached by Jon Carnahan and Bob Talbott, were major factors in leading the conference to a productive conclusion. Special thanks are due to Connie Green, Maxine Krohn, and Lillian Morgan for their initial labors of love on the notes produced by the conference participants. Thanks also to Jon Carnahan, Connie Green, John Keyser, Marcia Peglow-Hoch, Jerry Berger, and Jim Roberts for reviewing drafts of the following paper. The document does not have a single author, nor is it the product of the conference planners; rather, it is hoped that this document is an adequate summary of the discussions of the approximately one-hundred-sixty educators present at the May 1986 conference. The paper is intended as a draft to spur further development and revision of action plans for student success in community colleges.

INTRODUCTION

An action conference on the issues of student success was held in Portland, Oregon, on May 8 and 9, 1986. Approximately one-hundred-sixty community college staff members from colleges in Oregon and Washington attended Student Success Strategies, the First Northwest Regional Conference of the National Council on Student Development. The conference was planned and hosted by the Council of Student Services Administrators and was co-sponsored by the American College Testing Program, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, and the Oregon Department of Education. The goal of the conference was to stimulate and share ideas to better ensure student success. Each of thirty colleges sent a team of participants so individual action plans could be developed for each school.

Key articles on the issues of access, assessment, and intervention and an idea paper on these issues, drafted by John Keyser, president of Clackamas Community College, were distributed to conference attendees prior to the meeting dates. The conference process included assigning all attendees to small groups, three groups considering access, five assessment, and seven intervention. Each group was assisted by a community college staff member who volunteered to facilitate. Each facilitator worked with his or her group to develop ideas, to provide an oral report at the conference, and to provide written results of the group discussions. These reports and the working notes of the small-group sessions were used to create a summary document.

Terry O'Banion, executive director of the League for Innovation, opened the conference with "status reports" on community colleges in 1960, 1970, and 1990. His historical review and future projections relating to access, assessment and intervention did much to prompt thoughtful discussion in the small-group sessions. A panel discussion by community college presidents and an ACT representative brought additional perspective to these complex issues of ongoing interest to college educators.

The role of the facilitators was essential in stimulating discussion and in synthesizing the thoughts of the groups into recommendations. The following report was based on those draft recommendations. Although

the conference attendees as a whole have not reviewed the report, the recommendations included are drawn from the reports given in the closing assembly and are presented here as a *first draft* plan to initiate further discussion in each Oregon and Washington college. The plan will provide the basis for the follow-up student success conference in February 1987. Participants at the Second Student Success Strategies Conference will examine effective northwest community college practices and further develop plans for improvements in the areas of access, assessment, and intervention. These concerted efforts and continued discussion on the critical issues will result in the sharing of the best ideas of educators in our region and will lead to marked improvement in student success at our community colleges.

ACCESS

The issue of access continues to arise in reviews of college policies and operations that affect student awareness, choice, and use of college programs and services. Action areas include 1) providing information about procedures and standards to high school students and to other potential student populations as well as to current students, 2) providing services "at the front-end" which are designed to ease enrollment of any student at the time and place of first inquiry and of subsequent enrollments, 3) providing the instructional support to students that enables academic success within the open doors of the community college, and 4) providing services and instruction addressing the broadest possible range of student needs

Information:

Essential to the first action area are simplified publications and forms, well-coordinated informational programs that reach potential students, and well-trained and enthusiastic front-line staff. Commitment to access for all who can profit from community college instruction is a commitment to effective market research and to effective promotion, to broadening community support, and to creating information networks that direct community members to their community college for education and training.

Targeting of populations (for example, single-parents) through specific informational campaigns will allow the college to fulfill its responsibility to offer instruction to those not readily informed about educa-

tional opportunities. Publication of the student outcomes resulting from community college experiences will contribute to access for those unsure of the value of college.

"Front-end" Services:

Access is not just getting many students in the door; it is providing the services that encourage them to stay. Assuring the quality of initial and recurring contacts of students with front-line staff is essential. Many uncertain applicants and even currently enrolled students choose to leave college because of non-supportive front-line staff or procedures. Shifting resources to registration, admissions, and early advising processes may help make access a reality. Adequate staffing of registration, admissions, and advising functions and staff development directed at improving staff response to incoming students are worthy goals.

Instructional Support:

Community colleges must identify the basic skill reqirements of classes and programs, the skills of entering and continuing students, and the variety of instructional delivery methods that will best serve the variety of learning modes which students possess. We must provide a clear continuum of instruction in basic skills and train all staff in how to refer students to needed supplemental instruction. More specific recommendations to support instruction are as follows: 1) Coalitions with all resources in the community should be established. 2) Reasons for student deficiencies shoud be assessed and broad-based evaluation of problems should be encouraged. 3) Instructors should be offered professional development workshops on teaching effective learning. 4) Instructors with appropriate training and commitment should be hired or retained for the developmental education staff. 5) Uses of technology in instructional delivery, especially in basic skills, should be expanded.

Special Needs and Services:

The special service needs of community college students, including part-time and off-campus students as well as those enrolled for short-term training, must be addressed. Important services highlighted at the conference are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Receptive staff along with timely and widespread use of college publications to inform students of financial aid program provisions and

deadlines are essential. All staff should be able to refer students to financial aid resources. Getting good information to students may require providing financial aid workshops about forms and processes. Scholarship information should be made available by departments and to specific student populations. More funding options, including student employment opportunities, and more scholarhips through college foundation dollars or other sources are essential to students. Inexpensive child care and discounted transportation are also important. Additional financial assistance to students may be provided through variable tuition rates, textbook exchanges, textbook standardization, and the use of reserve textbooks.

Other student services essential to ensuring accessibility of college education are counseling, including peer counseling, student activity programs, support groups, and clubs.

Flexible scheduling promoting accessibility incudes open-entry/open-exit classes; alternative length classes; variable credit classes; weekend, evening, early morning, and outreach degree and certificate programs: "high tech" delivery modes; variable site locations for classes (business, industry, government, organization); alternative start dates for classes; and accelerated learning modes and experiences. Finally, community colleges should cooperate to design classes and programs for geographical areas that presently are not served or are served marginally.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment involves placing students in courses and programs which are appropriate to their achievement levels, motivation, and goals. Successful assessment programs depend on institutional and college-wide commitment, that is, the active support of board, administration, faculty, and staff. Personal interaction with students throughout the assessment process is necessary, as is sensitivity to student anxieties about and resistance to assessment techniques. Treatment of the individual in the assessment process affects the student's choice to enroll, to persist, and to succeed.

When to Assess:

Assessment is an ongoing process. It begins before the student actually enters, continues through the period of enrollment, and ends after

program/goal accomplishment. Assessment should occur before course selection and before program entry.

Assessment programs should be ongoing in the early weeks of a new student's program to determine student progress and to validate assessment tools. The value of the assessment process should be repeatedly made known to all staff, and there should be a college commitment to change the process as necessary.

What to Assess:

Students can be best advised and placed in college work if so-called "life skills" and personal information are assessed as well as academic skills. Academic skills often assessed are reading and math level, writing and reasoning abilities, speaking and listening skills, program-specific skills, time-management and study skills, and other learning skills. Life skills and personal information assessed at various colleges include motivation, values, self-esteem, self-assessed abilities, goals, social skills, prior experience, and situational support.

Assessment of academic/cognitive skills can be accomplished through the use of assessment instruments that have proven validity and reliability. Assessment of life skills and personal information can best be accomplished through the use of questionnaire instruments and/or interviews with trained staff.

All students should receive some type of assessment. At the time of initial student inquiry, assessment of special needs and of interest in specific programs might occur. Pre-enrollment counseling, while providing general college information and career guidance, should determine the student's background and goals, determine what assessment is necessary for that particular student, and emphasize the benefits of assessment to students. A limited formal assessment may result in full assessment, for all students entering courses or programs with academic skill requirements; special assessment, for students found to need special diagnostic tests; or other assessment, as needed.

Identification of an individual advisor who could participate with the student in assessment procedures and help develop a program of study is important. Requiring an advisor's signature may be valuable when students register for more than a few hours per term. When students have accumulated more than 25 credit hours by taking one or two courses per term, intervention and further assessment may be required.

A factor for student and advisor to consider in planning a schedule should be a balance of class load and outside commitments. Contacts with an advisor should occur from the beginning of the first term throughout the term. Other contacts might be follow-up for those who never enroll after being admitted, "early warnings" for those with academic problems, and follow-up on student withdrawals. All staff must be alert to signs of student dissatisfaction and have a procedure to follow to prompt intervention.

Mandatory Assessment:

Assessment results should be advising tools for proper course placement and should assist students in reaching their goals. Any mandatory placement or exclusion from school or programs should come only after full assessment and then should have routes of appeal.

Mandatory assessment programs are recommended only if the following conditions are present:

1. valid and reliable assessment instruments
2. established cut-off scores that truly distinguish between likely success or non-success of students
3. evidence that prerequisite courses, being successfully completed, lead to success in following courses
4. reasonably short times required for completion of prerequisite and preparatory courses
5. adequate information available to acquaint students with the assessment placement system
6. provisions for waiving assessment placement
7. informed interpretation of the assessment results. (Results should be released to students only with proper interpretation and to faculty/staff only if they have a need to know, are skilled in assessment interpretation, and understand the limitations of the assessment tools.)

The relationship of assessment to student progress should be continually evaluated for modification of the assessment process. Evaluation may include not only general student information but also data for specific courses, such as data predicting student success (based on grades received in prerequisite courses) and data regarding individual instructor grading practices. Recommendations for improving methods of instruction and modifying college services may come from the evaluation of student progress statistics.

INTERVENTION

Intervention is any action the college takes to participate in the progress of the student. The philosophy of intervention is a "right to succeed" philosopy. Interventions literally "come between" the student and failure. Interventions should be systematic and a part of the ongoing functions of the institution. The system should operate as early and often as necessary in a student's academic progress to enable student success. Intervention strategies require the ability to collect information and staff to coordinate intervention efforts.

Important components of intervention are coordinated college-wide commitment, orientation processes, and academic progress systems. These components must be evaluated regularly and the results should demonstrate improved student performance. Policies should be reexamined and redefined to serve changing student needs.

Coordinated College-wide Commitment:

The board and president must play a significant role by identifying retention as a major goal. A college-wide commitment should result in identified budget expenditures and be reflected in the college mission statement, in written goals and objectives, and in an action plan for intervention. A college-wide intervention task force may be warranted. The task force may provide data from pilot projects as background information for planning. The completed system must involve instructional staff, with the dean of student services and the dean of instruction, instructional area directors, department chairs, faculty, student services staff, and students having roles. While top-down support and encouragement is needed, communications among student services, instructional, and support staff must be enhanced. Each needs improved understanding of the complementary roles played. Joint meetings, area liaisons and openhouses, and regular meetings of instructional and student services deans are avenues to promote understanding. Existing support systems, such as counseling, advising, and registration may need reorganization as elements of a unified support system, and developmental education should be supported and enhanced as a central resource for student success.

Ongoing staff development is essential and should support the action plan. Staff inservice could provide factual information about retention

issues, showing how intervention is everyone's responsibility. Workshops to develop new skills and form strategies to change the teacher-learner interaction could be provided. Facilitated discussions to reveal faculty and student perceptions may be important. A re-evaluation of the instructor-student relationship could be necessary as there is no consensus as to how far beyond course content and classroom management the instructor's responsibility should extend.

Orientation:

Student orientation is an important component of an intervention system. Orientation should be upbeat, simple in structure, and have obvious results. It should be available on both a drop-in and scheduled basis. Orientation may be a class, a videotape, one session, or several sessions. While focused on immediate goals, orientation should also address the individual's long-term plans. Orientation should deal with college procedures and programs; academic regulations; college vocabulary; study skills; and life skills (e.g., time management, housing/rental issues, money management, substance abuse, parenting, assertiveness, stress management). New student orientation should be mandatory for those enrolling in six credits or more or for those who have accumulated 25 developmental education or transfer course credits.

Academic Progress:

At the heart of any effective academic progress system are early warnings, identifying problems before the 4th week of a term. The early warning process is a support system for instructors and students, referring students early and naturally (i.e., when students *begin* to have academic difficulties) to tutorial help, a learning center, or counseling. Human interaction is an essential part of all effective interventions monitoring student progress. A specific early warning strategy has faculty instigate or execute phone calls or letters to students. These calls or letters identify resources or suggest a conference with an instructor. In addition to an early warning system, timely progress reports from instructors on successes as well as problems should occur once a pattern emerges, at midterm or just before, and as pre-final department recommendations for a next class. Another facet of academic progress is end-of term monitoring. This process can be used to encourage students, to credit students for their success, and to intervene with students who did not meet their goals.

Optional Intervention Strategies:

Another option is to develop student-to-student support groups. Big brother/big sister relationships and groups by major/discipline or by like populations (e.g., minorities, teen mothers, adult learners, displaced homemakers) are possibilities.

One successful strategy for intervention is a class on developing student survival techniques. Such questions as how to obtain class information if a student has been absent can be addressed. One last option is a handbook or a student tour guide service both for current and prospective students.

SUMMARY

The Student Success Strategies conference gave participants the opportunity to share insights and to share practical solutions to dilemmas involved with student success. The continuing discussions regarding access, assessment, and intervention will differ from college to college. A goal of the conference was to disseminate those discussions along with shared insights and solutions, and to further develop effective networks of community college professionals. We will continue to strive to answer the questions posed by Terry O'Banion:

> What is excellent teaching?
> Who is an excellent teacher?
> What is worth learning?
> How do we know anyone has learned anything?

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